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ABSTRACT

The North American Council on Adoptable Children surveyed 64 private and 23 public child placement agencies in 25 states in the fall of 1990. Of the agencies that responded, 83 percent were aware of barriers preventing families of color from adopting. Frequently cited barriers were: (1) institutional racism; (2) lack of people of color in managerial positions; (3) adoption fees; (4) the tendency of communities of color to see adoption as an informal activity; (5) negative perceptions of agencies; (6) lack of minority staff; (7) inflexible adoption standards; and (8) lack of recruitment activity. Results indicated that 78 percent of black children and 38 percent of Hispanic children were placed in same-race homes. Agencies specializing in the placement of minority children had higher percentages of same-race placements than did traditional private agencies. Additional factors discussed include the dichotomy in the adoption of healthy infants and unhealthy or older children, the role of independent adoption, and the effects of litigation. In implementing their programs, agencies committed to same-race placement should consider the following factors: (1) ongoing recruitment of minority families; (2) retention of minority families in their programs; (3) an informative home study process; (4) the use of reasonable fees; and (5) state financial assistance. (BC)

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Research Brief #2

April 1991

Barriers to Same Race Placement

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April 1991

Barriers to Same Race Placement

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Executive Summary

Transracial adoption—the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families—has been a source of controversy among adoption professionals for over 20 years. The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), like many other national and local organizations, has grappled with the complex issues it raises through a long history of dialogue and policy development. Still, fundamental disagreement over the propriety and prevalence of transracial placement remains.

NACAC undertook this survey of 64 private and 23 public child placing agencies in 25 states during the fall of 1990 to add factual information to the debate. (The survey focused specifically on placement of children of color legally freed for adoption. It did not address issues raised when white foster families wish to adopt their minority foster children.) Much of the discussion of barriers facing prospective minority adoptive families has been based purely on anecdotal information. It has also been commonly accepted that agencies vary widely in their philosophies and approaches to same race placement, but again, clear documentation has been scarce. NACAC is pleased that this survey—though far from comprehensive or rigorously scientific—provides concrete information in these regards. Answers to the survey's 42 questions shed light on placement practices and highlight policies and procedures most directly affecting minority adoption.

The survey's findings were quite revealing. Individuals from 87 agencies placed 13,208 children, including 6,347 children of color, in their most recent reporting years. More importantly, eighty-three percent of respondents said they were aware of organizational and/or institutional barriers preventing or discouraging families of color seeking to adopt. Those most frequently cited were:

- ***Institutional/Systemic Racism.*** Virtually all procedures and guidelines impacting standard agency adoption are developed from white middle-class perspectives.
- ***Lack of People of Color in Managerial Positions.*** Boards of directors and agency heads remain predominantly white.
- ***Fees.*** Seventy-five percent of agencies surveyed said adoption fees are a barrier to minority families trying to adopt.
- ***"Adoption as Business" Mentality/Reality.*** Heavy dependence upon fee income, coupled with the fact that supplies of healthy white infants are decreasing drastically, force many agencies to place transracially to ensure survival.
- ***Communities' of Color Historical Tendencies Toward "Informal" Adoption.*** Potential adopters of color question the relevance of formalized adoption procedures, many times wondering why such procedures are needed at all.

- ***Negative Perceptions of Agencies and Their Practices.*** Families of color often possess negative perceptions of public and private agencies and their underlying motives.
- ***Lack of Minority Staff.*** Minority workers "in the trenches" are crucial in building trust among families of color. Consequently, their relative scarcity impedes minority families hoping to adopt.
- ***Inflexible Standards.*** Insistence upon young, two-parent, materially-endowed families eliminates many potentially viable minority homes.
- ***General Lack of Recruitment Activity and Poor Recruitment Techniques.*** Agencies are unable to set aside financial and human resources required for effective recruitment.
- ***Word Not Out.*** Communities of color remain largely unaware of the need for their services.

The placement data collected from agencies provides other important insights as well. Overall, 78 percent of the Black children and 38 percent of the Hispanic children in the sample population were placed in same race homes. However, upon closer inspection, more detailed information is rapidly uncovered.

For example, 17 agencies "specializing" in the placement of minority children found same race homes for 94 percent of their 341 Black children and 66 percent of their 38 Hispanic children. In contrast, "traditional" private agencies did so only 51 percent of the time with their 806 Black children and 30 percent of the time with their 168 Hispanic children.

While equally as interesting, contrasting private agencies with public ones was more difficult because of poor record-keeping in the public sector. (This should improve within a year when a federal data collection system on foster care and adoption becomes mandatory.) Only eight of 23 public agencies interviewed had statistics enabling same race placement percentages to be computed. In these eight, however, 91 percent of Black children and 40 percent of Hispanic children were placed in same race homes.

When children's ages at placement are included in the analysis, discrepancies between same race placement rates of specializing and public agencies and those of traditional agencies become even more startling. Minority children placed through public agencies and specializing agencies are often older or have special needs, yet are still placed with same race families at higher rates than healthy infants placed by traditional agencies.

It is also interesting to note how groups of agencies with different placement rates compare with respect to the various barriers listed above. For example, only 41 percent of specializing agencies charge adoption fees, but virtually all (91 percent) traditional

SAME RACE PLACEMENTS and PLACEMENTS by AGE			
	Public Agencies	**Minority Placement Specialists**	**Traditional Non-Specializing Agencies**
Percentage of Black and Hispanic Children Placed in Same Race Homes	**85%**	**91%**	**47%**
AGE BREAKDOWN OF CHILDREN PLACED:			
Infants (0-24 months)	**19%**	**54%**	**87%**
Preschoolers (2-5 years)	**35%**	**20%**	**5%**
School-Aged (6-12 years)	**37%**	**21%**	**6%**
Adolescents (13-17 years)	**9%**	**5%**	**2%**

agencies do. Moreover, when fees are charged, they average $1,439 among minority placement specialists but a much higher $5,780 in traditional agencies.

It is clear that there are lessons to be learned from agencies successfully placing large percentages of children in same race families. Agencies believing in the importance of same race placement will do as much as possible to institutionalize policies and procedures that minimize the barriers enumerated above. Agencies committed to same race placement must consider the following in their programs and policies:

- ***Recruitment.*** Recruitment must be on-going, and should include a wide variety of tools and techniques. Flexibility—screening families in rather than screening them out—is critical, as are cooperative arrangements with other organizations in the community.
- ***Retention.*** Potential adoptive parents must be responded to quickly and openly. Staff must be available at times convenient for prospective parents, not vice versa.
- ***The Homestudy Process.*** Homestudies must move away from an investigative style to an informative one. Flexibility and clear explanations should also play integral parts in culturally sensitive adoption studies.
- ***Fees.*** Adoption fees are perceived by respondents as having a dramatically negative impact on almost all prospective minority adopters. Agencies must commit to making fees reasonable for all, and must understand that problems families of color have with adoption fees are often as much attitudinal as financial. Thorough explanations delineating between "fees for service" and the "buying of human flesh" are a necessity.
- ***State Involvement.*** States must assume fiscal responsibility for costs of adoption if true commitments to same race placement are to be made. States can assist private agencies by providing start-up funds for recruitment and retention programs, as

well as supplying continuing support through ongoing purchase of service agreements.

It is our hope that the information provided in this survey, and the questions raised by it, will be used to inform and shape policy and practice in the adoption community as well as the community at large. The experience of agencies specializing in placement of minority children shows clearly that families of color adopt in significant numbers when barriers are removed. There is no doubt that a permanent home is the absolute highest priority for any child. But we do *not* have to choose between permanence and same race homes for children who wait. Our choice is either to commit to changes that enable same race placements or to remain with the status quo.

Purpose and Methodology

The opinions on and attitudes toward transracial adoption are as numerous and diverse as the wide array of people holding and formulating them. As such, strong arguments—both for and against—the supposed merits of same race placement are readily constructed. This paper in no way aspires to resolve the debate emanating from these passionate pleas. Rather, its primary purpose is to present and analyze a factual compilation of those policies and procedures most often invoked by public and private agencies across the country in the recruitment, retention, and utilization of families of color for adoption.

In order to obtain this information, 87 child-placing agencies (64 private and 23 public) in 25 states were surveyed via telephone between August 1990 and January 1991. Of the 64 private agencies, 17 were minority placement specialists—that is, agencies having as or perceiving of their sole or primary responsibility the placement of minority children with minority families. Actual interviewees included 29 executive directors, 19 state adoption supervisors, 31 program/unit heads, and 8 case workers. In general, attention was focused on agencies either working with or located in areas containing significant populations of color. Although the sample observed was far from random, conscious efforts were made to ensure that a distinctly varied population (i.e., agencies charging large fees and agencies charging no fees, agencies working solely with infants and agencies working primarily with older children, agencies sponsored by churches and agencies with no religious affiliation, et cetera) was studied and that a balanced geographical distribution was maintained.

The survey itself consisted of 42 questions requesting (1) data on children and families worked with in the past year and (2) information and insight into agency policy and practice regarding minority adoption. The survey instrument focused on domestic adoptions and was designed to uncover and illuminate practices involved in placing minority children legally freed for adoption, not to investigate problems arising when children of color are placed with white foster families later wishing to adopt them. It should be pointed out that replies to number (1) above varied significantly in quantity and quality. While private agencies were relatively complete in their statistical provision, public agencies often were unable to provide asked-for data. For example, while 18 of 23 public agencies could provide information on the race of children being placed, only 8 of 23 could provide information on the race of the adopting parent(s). Consequently, care should be exercised in interpreting numerical information presented in this report, particularly that pertaining to adoption activities in public systems.

General Findings

As would be expected, a broad range of responses were recorded. Differences in agency practice and philosophy were dramatic, ranging in scope from those who "simply don't do transracial adoption" to those who "don't search for a same race family at all . . . we immediately place transracially," and from those who "just can't find any families of color" to those who are "overwhelmed by calls" from prospective minority adopters.

Nevertheless (and despite the caveat issued above), several noteworthy statistics for the group as a whole were ascertainable. The 87 agencies facilitated adoptive placement of 13,208 children overall and 6,347 children of color in their most recent (1989-90) reporting year.

NUMBER of CHILDREN PLACED by RACE and AGENCY TYPE

	Public Agencies*	Minority Placement Specialists	Traditional Non-Specializing Agencies	Total
White	5,013 (49%)	37 (9%)	1,616 (61%)	6,666 (50%)
Non-White**	5,115 (51%)	382 (91%)	1,045 (39%)	6,542 (50%)
Total	10,128	419	2,661	13,208

Note: Public agency figures may duplicate those of private agencies when children involved are state wards.
*18 of 23 public agencies reporting
**Non-white includes Black, Hispanic, Native American, and other.

More importantly, where estimable, roughly 78 percent of the Black children and 38 percent of the Hispanic children placed in the sample population were placed in same race homes. (Note: Numbers of Native American, Asian, and other children of color placed in the sample population were insufficient to allow similar estimation.) However, and as will be discussed in more detail later, a breakdown of these figures proves highly informative. Moreover, unless carefully considered, the percentages tend to mislead by understating the overall shortage of families of color participating in foster care and adoption processes. While they do shed general light on the rates at which minority children are being placed in minority homes, the figures reveal nothing about the disproportionately high numbers of children of color still waiting to be adopted—a figure reported to be approaching 65 percent in one state and 50 percent in several others. In other words, while agencies in the survey may, as many indicated, "do all that they can" to place a minority child in a same race family *once such a family is available*, they are still unable to attract and retain the numbers of Black and Hispanic adopters needed to

completely satisfy children's needs for them.

Why does such a shortage persist? Are there certain factors that hinder or impede families of color attempting to adopt? Our study suggests there are. When asked if they were aware of any organizational or institutional barriers preventing or discouraging families of color seeking to adopt, 83 percent of the agencies said they were. Most reported recognition of numerous barriers of this sort. Those most frequently cited were:

Institutional/Systemic Racism

Many respondents indicated that adoption is simply a microcosm of our racist society. Racism "permeates all institutions . . . including the adoption system" and "taints everything that we do." As a result, white, middle-class attitudes "dominate in adoption as they do everywhere else." What this means in practice is that "virtually all procedures and guidelines" impacting standard agency adoption "are developed with this perspective in mind." Hence, whether conscious of the fact or not, agencies have come to espouse—and cater to those holding—distinctly middle-class views. Unfortunately, as those interviewed often stated, many families of color don't have a mindset that allows them to or aren't familiar with accessing "middle-class agencies."

Lack of People of Color in Managerial Positions.

One offshoot of this institutional racism is the fact that boards of directors and agency heads remain predominantly white. "Many of these folks are completely out of touch with minority communities" and are often more interested in preserving the status quo than in remedying the situation. More importantly though, "we get no true commitment to families of color from the top down . . . we get lip service, but no true commitment."

Fees

Seventy-five percent of the agencies felt that adoption fees were, *at the very least*, "somewhat of a barrier" to families of color seeking to adopt. While sheer and increasing magnitudes of fees were deemed problematic by many, an even greater number indicated fee barriers are as much psychological as financial. For obvious historical reasons, the Black community in particular remains strongly opposed to "purchasing a child." As several directors confirmed, the horrors and images of slavery are far from dead. As such, even when affordable, most monetary exchanges construable as "payments for human flesh" are deeply resented, leading a host of administrators to contend that "it's not adoption fees per se that are a barrier, but the lack of clear explanation of them."

"Adoption as Business" Mentality/Reality

Given that fees are a barrier, why not reduce or waive them? "Reality won't allow it" says one executive director, "particularly in the private sector." On average, fees make up 57 percent of the budgets of private agencies charging them. This heavy dependence upon fee income, coupled with the fact that supplies of healthy white infants are decreasing drastically, forces many agencies to place transracially "just to guarantee survival." One agency head frames the dilemma more pejoratively. "If your agency relied on fees, where would you place a minority kid . . . with a white family that can afford to pay, or a Black family that can't?"

Communities' of Color Historical Tendencies Toward "Informal" Adoption

Many of those interviewed pointed to the strong informal networks at work in Black and Hispanic communities as barriers to "official" enlistment of minority families. As has been the case for many years, unstructured, extended-family adoption continues to play a definitive role in the cultural make-up of many communities of color. Due to the strengths of these traditions, potential adopters of color are often put off by the formal procedures now prevalent in agency adoption, sincerely wondering "why such procedures are needed at all?"

Negative Perceptions of Agencies and Their Practices

According to those surveyed, many families of color possess negative perceptions of both public and private agencies and "what they're up to." Agencies are generally viewed with distaste and distrust, as interrogators largely responsible for conducting police and credit checks. All in all, both systems are seen—albeit sometimes wrongly—as slow, very intimidating, and very intrusive. Public adoption agencies are additionally burdened with the unfavorable images accruing to other social service divisions in their states. As one director asserts, many minority families make little, if any, differentiation between adoption workers and "those public workers harassing them about food stamps or investigating abuse allegations."

Lack of Minority Staff

Along with the shortage of managers of color noted above, a lack of minorities "working in the trenches" was also regularly mentioned as a significant impediment to families of color wanting to adopt. Minority workers are crucial because "they are really the only ones with their fingers on the pulses of minority communities." While culturally sensi-

tive white workers may be effective at times, they "simply don't build up the levels of trust that workers of color do." Moreover, biases of white workers, even when well-hidden, are believed to cause families of color to drop or be screened out of adoption processes at much higher rates than their white counterparts.

Inflexible Standards

While lack of minority staff is a major contributor to the shortage of families of color, so too are the inflexible standards that continue to be adhered to and enforced by many adoption agencies. Although less so than in the past, young, two-parent, materially-endowed families are still regarded as "ideal" adoptive parents by most adoption workers. By and large, agencies cling to "super-traditional" guidelines—guidelines originally aimed at reducing the number of *white* applicants eligible to adopt from a rapidly shrinking pool of *white* infants—and workers hold fast to preconceived and narrow-minded notions of what acceptable adoptive families are to look like. Although perhaps unintentionally, these restrictive approaches simultaneously limit the number of minority families seen as fit to adopt.

General Lack of Recruitment Activity and Poor Recruitment Techniques

Most agencies are now at least cognizant of the severe shortage of adopters of color in this country. However, respondents contend that only a few are truly dedicated to actively recruiting the numbers of families needed to fill the current void. Interviewees tended to attribute this lack of recruitment activity to the fact that only a handful of agencies are able—due to various organizational constraints—to set aside or earmark the financial resources and manpower needed to run comprehensive enlistment programs. Several, though, offered a more succinct assessment: "Most agencies are simply poor recruiters of minority families."

"Word Not Out."

Many of those interviewed claimed families of color remain largely unaware of the tremendous demand for their services. Despite increased efforts to heighten public recognition, "most families of color still just don't know about the problem. Until they do, we can't expect them to come forward en masse."

Statistical Breakdowns and Comparisons

As mentioned earlier, a more detailed look at the general findings presented above is highly beneficial in gaining a fuller understanding of the issues surrounding and practices affecting both same race and transracial adoption in this country. The three statistical breakdowns that follow are particularly helpful in this regard.

"Minority Placement Specialists" versus "Traditional Agencies"

As verified by many respondents, adoption in the private sector is now marked by a strong tendency toward "specialization"—i.e., the creation and proliferation of specific agencies to handle (and presumably handle expertly) primarily or only the placing of Black children in Black homes, specific agencies to handle primarily or only the placing of Hispanic children in Hispanic homes, and so on. Numerous American cities now have at least one agency serving or aspiring to serve in these capacities.

For our purposes, the pertinent questions emanating from this trend are obvious: Are these "experts" really able to recruit, retain, and utilize the services of families of color more successfully than their "traditional," non-specializing brethren? And, if they are, are there any identifiable differences in their policies and procedures that seem to allow them to do so? To aid in answering these questions, it was arranged that 17 of the 64 private agencies surveyed were minority adoption specialists. Their responses were then compiled and compared with those of non-specialized agencies.

In so doing, it was found that specialized agencies placed approximately 94 percent of their 341 Black children and 66 percent of their 38 Hispanic children in same race homes, but that traditional agencies did so only 51 percent of the time with their 806 Black children and 30 percent of the time with their 168 Hispanic children.

SAME RACE PLACEMENTS

	Minority Placement Specialists	Traditional Non-Specializing Agencies
SAME RACE PLACEMENTS		
Black	319/341 (94%)	408/806 (51%)
Hispanic	25/38 (66%)	50/168 (30%)
TRANSRACIAL PLACEMENTS		
Black	22/341 (6%)	398/806 (49%)
Hispanic	13/38 (34%)	118/168 (70%)

Furthermore, eight traditional agencies placed *at least 85 percent* of their children of color *transracially*. In total, these eight found same race homes for just nine percent of their minority children. Disparities in same race percentages become even more striking when considering that specialists attained their higher success rates

despite generally working with "kids who are older and more difficult to place" (46 percent of their children above the age of two versus 13 percent for traditional agencies).

Many differences in organizational structure and operational procedure were similarly dramatic. Thirty-eight percent of non-specialized agencies said that, in all practicality, families of color "don't even apply" to be adoptive parents with their agencies. Quite predictably, none of the specialized agencies found themselves in this situation. Moreover, when families of color did apply, they dropped out of adoption processes almost twice as rapidly when working with non-specialized agencies as with specialized ones.

PLACEMENTS by AGE

	Minority Placement Specialists	Traditional Non-Specializing Agencies
Infants (0-24 months)	227 (54%)	2311 (87%)
Preschoolers (2-5 years)	84 (20%)	127 (5%)
School-Aged (6-12 years)	86 (21%)	162 (6%)
Adolescents (13-17 yeears)	22 (5%)	61 (2%)

Why these discrepancies? Our survey pointed to several potential causes. First, 93 percent of minority placement specialists have workers of color on staff, compared to 55 percent of traditional agencies. Secondly, only 41 percent of the specialized agencies charge adoption fees, while virtually all (91 percent) traditional agencies do. More importantly, when fees are charged, they average $1439 among minority placement specialists but a much higher $5780 in traditional agencies. While it is true that many (71 percent) traditional agencies employ sliding fee scales—or, in much rarer instances, waive fees altogether—when working with families of color, their average rates remain substantially higher than those of their specializing counterparts. And thirdly, 82 percent of the agencies specializing in minority adoption have formal, written policies strongly emphasizing racial matching of adoptive children with adoptive families, versus a significantly lower 30 percent of traditional agencies.

While the differences highlighted above are substantial in their own right, a composite look at the eight "transracial placers"—those eight agencies placing over 85 percent of their minority children in different-race homes—reveals an even starker contrast among policies, procedures, and, most notably, attitudes of specializing and non-specializing agencies included in our survey. In direct opposition to the minority placement specialists, who as a group steadfastly believe that minority families can indeed be found for minority children, transracial placers claim "there just aren't any families [of color] out there" and that they "don't know where same race homes can be found." As might be expected, none of the eight has any sort of written policy calling for

the racial matching of adoptive children and adoptive families.

Transracial placers also distinguished themselves in their almost consensual treatment of adoption as a business that, like most other economic endeavors, revolves around fundamental forces of supply and demand. As a worker at one of these agencies plainly stated, "Adoption is like any other business . . . you look at what your needs are—your overhead, your salaries . . . and then you set your fees accordingly." In strict accordance with this "economic" mentality, the eight typically spoke of children in their agencies as commodities, acquirable by any family willing to pay a fair market price for them. They assume that prices for children—like those of all other saleable goods—vary according to characteristics possessed by the good in question. For one transracial placer, this principle helped explain "why we *only* got $6,000 for a couple of our children last year." The word "only" is appropriate considering the average fee charged by the eight was $9562 and that one agency received $20,000 for each of the placements it completed. Another admits these rates adversely impact many prospective adopters of color. "Most families of color who approach us can't come anywhere close to meeting our fees."

Clearly, where already established, specializing agencies have made great inroads in finding minority homes for minority children. As a result, their emergence is seen as a "blessing" by a vast majority of respondents. Remarks like "the move toward specialization is a positive one" and "the fact that specialized agencies are gaining a foothold is a terrific development" were common. Furthermore, clients of color have themselves long been searching for agencies particularly suited to meeting their special needs. According to one program director, these people "are definitely looking for Black or Hispanic agencies . . . many of our families find us in the telephone book, where our cultural connotation is very explicitly stated."

Nonetheless, many directors—and often those guiding specialized agencies—voiced strong concerns and stern warnings as well. Most emphatically, under no circumstance should minority placement specialists be viewed as cure-alls for the problems at hand. Said one director, "Black families can finally go to an all-Black agency. But families are still suspicious . . . [They want to know] where the agency is getting its money, and so forth." Perhaps more critically, some surveyed are afraid that specialized agencies already operating may soon be overburdened by increasing demands placed upon them. As stated earlier, many metropolitan areas in this country now have at least one agency working primarily with clients of color. However, more often than not, "at least one" means only one. This being the case, one agency head seriously wonders

whether or not her organization "has enough resources to handle all of this 'specialized' work." Unstable or insufficient funding arrangements appear especially worrisome. Typically, specialized agencies are created and/or run, at least in part, with public monies. However, due to tightening fiscal situations in many states, the adoption community may be building a house of cards where these agencies are concerned. To remedy this situation, some sort of ongoing funding must be secured. "Unfortunately," as several interviewees pointed out, "this isn't happening right now." If this trend continues, administrators feel that specialized agencies may soon be forced into "shortcutting" or "running their operations on a shoestring."

Lastly, many surveyed worry that minority placement specialists provide an "easy out" for agencies not currently adept at, nor particularly interested in, working with families of color. In other words, specializing agencies may provide a convenient escape route for those traditional agencies unable or unwilling to recruit, retain, and utilize the services of minority adopters. Obviously, some referrals—i.e., "we don't have any Black families or kids right now, so why don't you go to Specialist A"—are made in good faith, but, as one interviewee put it, "to say that the 'easy way out' is not taken is probably incorrect." However, according to most, even when referrals are legitimate, one obvious question remains: "Why is it that referring agencies don't have any Black families or Black children?"

Candid responses by several agencies verified employment of the evasionary tactics spoken of above, none more forcefully than the director proclaiming that her agency "immediately refers to others" when approached by clients of color because "there are agencies out there who do that sort of thing." But, as minority placement specialists repeatedly stressed, "no *one* agency should be expected to do everything . . . [Interagency] collaboration is still needed for us to be most effective." In short, specializing agencies want it remembered that they were created to aid in, not become the sole facilitators of, minority adoption in this country; due to their limited resource bases, they simply are not equipped to handle each and every American adoption involving a child or family of color.

Public versus Private

As witnessed already, differentiations in practice within the private sector are fairly self-evident. Can similar delineations in policy and procedure regarding same race placement be made when comparing public and private adoption? Until drastic changes in record-keeping are made, we won't truly know. Only eight of 23 public agencies inter-

viewed currently keep or have available to them statistical compilations enabling same race placement percentages to be computed. Figures on races or ethnicities of adopting families were particularly sketchy. As a result, a majority of state supervisors knew little or nothing about the actual numbers of families of color utilizing their services, the numbers or percentages of white families adopting transracially through them, and the like. Four states could not even provide a racial breakdown of children placed by their public agencies in the past year. Remarks to the effect that "we don't keep that per se," "we don't have any printed reports on that," and "I just don't know about that at all" were the norm rather than the exception. The bottom line, according to one state supervisor, is that "there is just not near enough data collected overall."

Why this general lack of information in the public sector? The size and scope of most public agencies was cited for blame by many respondents. "Public agencies are so large, and adoption is just one piece of our operation. This fact alone means that our statistical situation is much different than that of the private agencies." However, our findings appear to undermine these "enormity as culprit" assertions, for several public systems maintaining detailed records—most notably Texas, Michigan, and Illinois—are among the larger ones in the country. Given that these states have been able to develop and implement adequate record-keeping mechanisms, it seems reasonable to assume that other, smaller public adoption agencies could, with more time and effort, do so as well. Several respondents hinted that this is in fact the case and that, as recently proposed in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' notice on mandatory adoption and foster care reporting (*Federal Register*, September 27, 1990, pg. 39450), increased emphasis and improvements are forthcoming. As was typically heard, "we don't have a whole lot of figures right now, but by this time next year we'll be in much better shape."

SAME RACE PLACEMENTS

	Public Agencies*	Private Agencies
SAME RACE PLACEMENTS:		
Black	1266/1396 (91%)	727/1147 (63%)
Hispanic	66/166 (40%)	75/206 (36%)
TRANSRACIAL PLACEMENTS:		
Black	130/1396 (9%)	420/1147 (37%)
Hispanic	100/166 (60%)	131/206 (64%)

*Eight of 23 states reporting

Despite these gaps in statistical information, numerous relationships affecting and separating the public and private sectors were detectable. In the eight states for which same race placement figures could be computed, public agencies as a whole placed 91 percent of their Black children and 40 percent of their Hispanic children in same race homes. These figures

compare favorably to the 64 percent of Black children and 36 percent of Hispanic children placed with like-race families by private agencies, especially when considering that same race percentages for the private sector were unduly weighted by the disproportionately large number of specialists included in the sample population. While 17 of 64 private agencies surveyed specialize in minority adoption, they are found with much less regularity among United States adoption agencies in general.

PLACEMENTS by AGE

	Public Agencies*	Private Agencies
Infants (0-24months)	1,611 (19%)	2,538 (82%)
Preschoolers (2-5 years)	2,839 (35%)	211 (7%)
School-Aged (6-12 years)	3,033 (37%)	25,48 (8%)
Adolescent (13-17 years)	732 (9%)	83 (3%)

*15 of 23 states reporting

Directors in both public and private sectors voiced awareness of other program differences as well. "In comparing the two systems, you are not comparing apples to apples," said one. The biggest point of departure between the two is that "private agencies essentially get to choose who they want to work with." Consequently, "they end up with most of the 'clean' kids." Assuming, like those operating within it, that both age and race are considered "contaminating factors" in this framework, support generated for this contention was mixed at best. While children placed by private agencies were undeniably younger than those placed by their public counterparts (82 percent under two years of age versus 19 percent for the public sector), those thinking or claiming that "private agencies rarely place minority children" appear mistaken. An almost identical percentage of placements (51percent public, 46 percent private) made in each sector were children of color. Even when removing activities of specialists from their totals, children of color still made up 36 percent of the placements made by private agencies.

Several other distinctions are more clear cut. Roughly 75 percent of the public agencies surveyed charge no fees at all—compared to only 22 percent of private agencies. Furthermore, those that do charge fees receive only minimal amounts, usually less than $500. *On the surface,* public agencies also appear to have a stronger dedication to same race placement than do private agencies. Seventy-six percent of the state agencies have formal, written policies on racial matching of adoptive children with adoptive families (versus 44 percent of private agencies) and all recruit minority families at some level, with nearly three of four possessing or following a specific model for doing so.

However, the words "on the surface" in the preceding paragraph remain operative. While it is true that all the public agencies recruit minority families at some level, the

extent to which that recruitment is carried out varies widely. In some states, a majority of counties actively pursue families of color, but in others conscientious recruitment may occur in only one branch office or one metropolitan area. Many state administrators echoed the sentiments of those who said "we are not doing as well as we think we can" or that "our minority recruitment is getting better, but it still suffers from a lack of coordination and a lack of funding." Another public adoption worker was even harsher in her critique of her state's recruitment policies. "When you come right down to it, there is little recruitment going on." As far as she's concerned, her state is simply not taking the necessary steps nor making the necessary adjustments to further its enlistment of minority adopters.

A closer look at trends affecting public and private agencies and the relationships between them reveals other findings of significance as well. As has been the case for quite some time, there is still a stigma surrounding the public system. It is perceived that "private agencies have nicer facilities and 'better' babies. This is obviously not true, but it's still a common perception." More concretely, and for a variety of reasons, roughly 40 percent of all respondents (public and private combined) indicated that in their state there is at least a partial "mismatch" between where children of color who need to be adopted and families of color seeking to adopt them end up. Often, minority children are in the private system while minority families are in the public system, though at times the reverse holds true.

In light of these problems, the need for cooperative efforts between public and private sectors appears categorical. Fortunately, our study indicates that such efforts are increasingly being undertaken. Several directors proudly referred to the centralized listings of children and families of color compiled and shared by public and private agencies in their states. Furthermore, almost all (86 percent) public agencies surveyed have some sort of contractual arrangement with private agencies in their states to garner assistance in locating and recruiting minority adoptive families.

However, as with the differences in minority recruitment discussed earlier, the degree to which these cooperative agreements are utilized varies widely from state to state. While one public agency contracts with nearly all of its state's private agencies, another works with only one. Moreover, hurdles discouraging or diminishing the effectiveness of these linkages remain substantial. As one state supervisor put it, "if a private agency can't locate a family, they will *first* try another private agency so that they can get the dollars they're looking for. Then they will try us." A program director at a private agency voiced his side of the story: "The state isn't subsidizing us sufficiently so that we

can facilitate same race adoptions at low or no cost." These monetary obstacles must be overcome if unified campaigns to secure the services of families of color are to be conducted in the future.

Regional Differences

Societal views on the propriety of transracial adoption differ radically in different parts of the country. Can similar regional distinctions be found in agency practice? The third and final breakdown made in this study looks at this question. To answer it, responses of the private, non-specialized agencies were tallied and compared according to their location in one of four geographic regions—the Northeast (New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C.), the South (Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, Texas, and Florida), the Midwest (Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Kansas, Missouri, Indiana, and Minnesota), and the West (California, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Washington).

According to our results, certain regional tendencies appear indisputable. Most strikingly, traditional agencies in the South appear much more likely than those in other regions to place their children of color—and particularly their Black children—transracially. In total, nearly two-thirds of Black children placed by Southern agencies ended up in white homes, while less than half of the Black children in each of the other three regions were placed transracially.

REGIONAL COMPARISON of TRADITIONAL NON-SPECIALIZING AGENCIES

	SOUTH	EAST	MIDWEST	WEST
Same Race Placements:				
Black	90/248 (36%)	84/154 (55%)	203/357 (57%)	38/47 (81%)
Hispanic	18/64 (28%)	1/22 (50%)	4/12 (33%)	17/70 (24%)
Average Fees Charged	$6659	$4445	$5079	$6684
Percentage of Black Children Placed Out-of-State	26%	1%	3%	4%
Percentage of Agencies With Formal Written Policies on Racial Matching	17%	43%	50%	33%

In addition, many transracial placements facilitated by Southern agencies were completed across state lines. Twenty-six percent of all Black children placed by tradi-

tional agencies in the South were placed out-of-state—a rate making them at least six times more likely than their regional counterparts to partake in such practices. With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that six of the eight transracial placers discussed earlier are Southern agencies.

Why the prevalence of this interstate activity? "There's no way around it," asserts one Southern director, "because there just aren't many families [of color] out there." "We attempt to recruit families of color, but can't," adds another. Other respondents, however, see things differently. They claim that certain agencies are essentially "baby sellers," routinely sending children to organizations in other parts of the country where fees are more easily collected and transracial adoption more acceptable. A caseworker in the Midwest verified that her agency is often a recipient of such deliveries. "Most of our Black children come from other states . . . the majority of them from the South." A respondent in the Northeast insisted that out-of-state facilitation can begin even before a child is born, with "poor minority girls from the South being paid to come up here and have their babies." Non-binding or incomplete adoption laws were blamed for the proliferation of these activities by several interviewees. For instance, in one Midwestern state, adoption regulations on racial matching apply only to children born in-state, meaning that agencies are free to bring in and transracially place children of color from other states.

Additional Findings

Our respondents readily identified three other major forces currently impacting and shaping same race adoption in this country.

The Dichotomy Between Healthy Infants and Other Children of Color

According to most of those surveyed, no discussion of same race or transracial adoption in America would be complete without some mention of the distinction existing between policies in place or appropriate for infants of color and those promulgated for older or handicapped minority children. One common thread seemed to link the responses and replies of almost all interviewees: while insistence upon same race placement may be entirely plausible for healthy infants (i.e., children under two), it becomes much more problematic when older and other harder-to-place children are involved.

Support for this assertion was virtually consensual. Many agencies, both public and private, explicitly stated or implied that "same race placement is good with infants, but it begins to fall apart in older and foster adoptions," or that "a fairly high number of Black families are waiting for our Black infants, but not for our older children." In the same vein, another agency head said her agency doesn't really face a shortage of minority families because "we place mainly infants, and everyone loves a baby." As further proof of the dichotomy's existence, only 13 percent of those asked said that it takes *longer* than six months to place a healthy minority infant with a minority family in their state, but 85 percent said that it does so when placing an older minority child.

Ramifications of the demarcation between healthy infant and older or handicapped child are fairly obvious. Numerous arguments calling for a separation of policies and procedures developed for the two groups were constructed. Said one director, "The extent to which same race placement is important really depends upon the individual needs of the child in question." In other words, operational standards may have to be relaxed in certain instances. "You simply can't sacrifice a [difficult to place] child's well-being by letting him or her languish in the system while you wait for a same race home." One specialist concurred, asserting that "every effort should be made to place a kid in a same race home. However, for a fifteen year old male, you may have to be open to transracial placement." None of this is to say that same race homes *can't* be found for older or handicapped children, for several of the most effective same race placers in the survey worked primarily with school-aged (six to 12), adolescent (13 to 17), or handicapped youth. Nevertheless, the efforts and success rates of these agencies were atypical of the sample population as a whole.

The Indeterminate Role of Independent Adoption

The second trend identified as dramatically affecting both adoption in general and same race placement in particular is the emergence of "independent vendors"—lawyers, doctors, ministers and others unaffiliated with public or private agencies—as key players in U.S. adoption scenarios. According to our respondents, the number of these vendors is now great, their impact extreme. As many reported, "Independent adoptions are rapidly increasing. They are very close to outnumbering agency adoptions here." But these developments should come as no surprise, said one executive director. "Laws are being made to kill the agencies. Attorneys and unlicensed centers are the obvious and intended beneficiaries . . . [We're] tightly controlled and restricted, but independent vendors are not." If this pattern continues, the consequences for agencies may be fatal, claims another. "In the next ten years, agencies—especially those dealing primarily with infants—will be a dying breed. Attorneys are taking over. We're trying to reverse this trend, but it's a losing battle."

How is the rise of the independent sector influencing same race and transracial adoption in this country? "That's a very good question," according to a majority of those interviewed, for what concerns them most about independent vendors is not what *is* known, but what *is not*. Although there was general agreement that the role of the independent sector is rapidly expanding, little if any consensus was reached when interviewees were asked to estimate the percentages of independent adoptions completed transracially in their respective states. While one director feels that most are same race (i.e., "most families willing to pay large fees to lawyers are white and looking for healthy white infants"), others are confident that the frequency of transracial adoption in the independent sector is "much higher than in general."

In the eyes of the respondents, this uncertainty prevails because "for the most part, there is no central record-keeping being done" nor "no real oversight" of independent vendors' activities. Such vendors are not, however, completely unregulated. Eighty-six percent of the states interviewed have laws governing independent placements in some way, shape, or form. However, where these guidelines exist, they often are cumbersome or insufficient. As one public adoption supervisor summarily stated, "the whole procedure [independent adoption] is pretty much outlined in statute, but keeping tabs on it is still real tough; there is always someone looking for a loophole."

Consequently, many respondents would like to see a tightening of current controls, particularly those pertaining to charges leviable by independent vendors. As voiced by one, "some sort of enforceable fee schedule is definitely needed." But in states

where such schedules have been imposed impact has been minimal, according to two respondents. In their states, there are to be no undue compensations nor profits made of any kind, "but rules are not adhered to." Transgressions of this sort were cited to combat the pleas of those advocating for categorical banishment—i.e., "*No* independent placements should be made"—of independent adoption. "The solution is not to make it illegal; the independent sector will then just go completely underground." Moreover, in states already making this declaration, interviewees say constant proposals are made to open it up again, "especially by the affluent."

Whatever the answer(s), concern among agencies remains high. Most agree on one point: "Somebody has to track independent adoptions better—who the adopting families are, how the placement works out, et cetera." (Unfortunately, the recently mandated federal foster care and adoption data collection system does not require reporting by private agencies or independent vendors.) If and when such tracking is undertaken, agencies are relatively certain results will show "licensed workers are better able to look out for the well-being of all involved" and that differing standards of practice now allowable will cease to persist.

The Effects of Actual and Potential Litigation

Lastly, a large number of those interviewed pointed to the dramatic and escalating impact that lawsuits, whether filed or threatened, are having on same race placement procedures throughout the United States. As formal charges leveled at several of our respondents—both public and private—attest, litigious pressures are undeniably influencing decision-making processes in minority adoption. The increasingly ominous possibility of legal action leaves many administrators feeling they have little choice but to reduce the stringencies of organizational policies regarding racial matching of adoptive children with adoptive families. As one interviewee said, even if they want to, agencies are becoming more and more reluctant to insist upon the necessity and "virtue" of same race placement.

This growing hesitancy is most directly manifested in alterations made in agencies' formal written statements on same race placement. Although a majority of respondents still have such policies, language utilized in them is becoming more open-ended and less restrictive, often requiring that a child's "ethnic and cultural needs" be met, but seldom demanding same race placement *per se*. For example, due to an investigation by the United States Office of Civil Rights (OCR), one staunch proponent of racial matching has been forced to adopt a policy stating that his agency will now conduct only "brief,

diligent searches" for same race families, while another has had to change agency guidelines so as to convince the OCR that when they have a transracial family ready to adopt they won't hold the child until a same race family becomes available. For legal purposes, an acceptable level of same race emphasis is rapidly emerging: race may be considered, but it may not be the sole determinant in placing a child of color. Agencies failing to adhere to this standard are, as one interviewee put it, "walking a real minefield."

Models for Success

This survey acknowledges that different types of agencies in different geographical regions meet with very different levels of success when recruiting, retaining, and utilizing the adoptive services of families of color. As we have seen, some accomplish these tasks with great regularity, while others seldom even come in contact with minority adopters. What accounts for this disparity? Are there any common, identifiable threads linking the operating procedures and philosophies of those seemingly most able to enlist families of color? This section addresses these inquiries in some detail. Solutions and models presented draw heavily upon ideas and practices of the minority adoption specialists mentioned earlier.

Recruitment

Agreement on the key to enhanced recruitment of minority families was nearly unanimous: communities of color, and especially the Black community, "must be bombarded with information . . . they need to constantly hear about the deficiencies" with which agencies are confronted. Efforts to educate in this regard must be non-stop because "adoption is still not really known as an option in many of these communities." In short, families of color need to be made aware that adoption is something they can do.

How is this "bombardment" best carried out? Means recommended were nearly as numerous as respondents making suggestions. However, there was general consensus among those most adept at recruiting minority adopters that "satisfied customers make for very good resources." Over 80 percent of specialzing agencies interviewed indicated word of mouth from one minority adoptive family to the next potential adoptive family is the most effective tool in their recruitment programs. As one stated, "previous adoptive families [of color] are our best advertisement—other families watch them very closely."

In addition to messages sent by past adopters, other commonly conveyed or innovative ways of "getting the word out" were: articles in African-American newspapers and major dailies, posters on public buses, "adoption parties" in neighborhoods of color, advertisements on billboards, radio and television spots, church bulletins, speaking engagements at businesses and civic organizations, and utilizations of other oft-used or densely populated public facilities (e.g., "setting up a booth over lunch hour in the State Office Building where our people specifically talk about the shortages of families of

color"). One agency head sees things more simply: "You just have to make sure you're in touch with all the central players in the communities you're interested in."

Personal characteristics of those delivering the message and doing the recruiting are also critical according to our respondents. Ideally, an agency has a staff person whose sole responsibility is the recruitment of minority families so that his or her energies can be completely focused on the job at hand. Furthermore, respondents generally believe that people of color make the best recruiters of families of color. Ninety-four percent of those surveyed agreed that an important part of recruiting minority families is having minority workers to handle their recruitment. "You need staff who are personally invested in the practice of same race placement," and "this seems to be a more common attribute among workers of color."

However, several interviewees had words of caution for those blindly asserting that hiring minority staff would instantly remedy recruitment situations in their agencies. Although, according to a majority of directors, workers of color "usually make for better identification and sensitivity," their mere presence is no guarantee that families of color "will come pouring in." Because of biases in education and training, minority workers can also come to espouse and adhere to traditional, middle-class standards. As one Black administrator said, "it's not just in white workers that middle-class attitudes predominate." Thus, while the race of the recruiter is no doubt significant, it is equally important that he or she "be someone with real cultural sensitivity."

Those surveyed also see a strong commitment to flexibility as a prerequisite for same race success. Agencies must be willing to take themselves to minority families geographically, work more on weekends, and to "start thinking about working five to nine rather than nine to five" because schedules of many families of color are not conducive to making and keeping appointments during traditional business hours. Consequently, adoption agencies need to hire with these expectations and demands firmly in mind.

In addition, many of those interviewed were adamant in their charges that agencies update their methods and mindsets by recognizing that new and different family structures are suitable for placement. Once again, flexibility becomes paramount. "We simply must be willing to look at older families, single-parent homes, welfare recipients, and the like." Ideally, recruiters and adoption workers should be "*screening in* rather than *screening out*."

Finally, respondents highlighted the importance of networking and information sharing in minority recruitment efforts. The efficacies of various cooperative arrange-

ments and ventures were identified in support of this contention. In one state, work of the Black Adoption Unit, a coalition linking the public and private sectors, was praised, while in another a Kinship Consortium of twenty agencies, mostly private, holds monthly meetings, plans major events, and is responsible for compiling a Black Family Registry to which all agencies have access. Other directors have chosen to hook up with organizations outside of traditional adoption arenas. "We try and get our children in the NAACP newsletter," says one. Whatever the method or medium, the central message remains unaltered: cooperation is essential in enlisting the adoptive services of families of color.

Retention

For virtually every agency struggling with minority recruitment there was another claiming that they "can recruit families of color, but can't retain them," or that they "get lots of inquiries, but lose families once formal proceedings begin." According to those interviewed, approximately 40 percent of all families of color drop out after their first contact with an adoption worker—roughly twice the rate reported for white families.

Can anything be done to reverse this tendency? "Retention is possible," says one agency specializing in Black adoption. "Once Black families are here, we just don't let them out the door." While an obvious overstatement, many specializing agencies have indeed dramatically reduced—several to less than ten percent—the dropout rates of families of color they come in contact with.

How do these "retainers" of minority applicants manage to do so? Most were quick to emphasize the importance of rapid response times (i.e., within 72 hours of initial inquiry) when working with families of color. Moreover, once an agency makes its response, contact with a family should be ongoing and intensive, with particular attention paid to the personal concerns of individual applicants. Retainers also stressed the need for clear definitions of expectations. "You must be honest and explicit in all that you do," making certain that "you fully explain what your purposes are." Many directly linked their high retention rates to the presence and abilities of staff members of color. As was the case in recruitment of minority families, efforts of workers of color also make retention "a whole lot easier." And lastly, those most able to hold families of color feel flexibility is again an undeniably critical element in agency practice. Rather than clinging steadfastly to formal rules and procedures, agencies have to be able to tailor their procedures to make them "user friendly." "You must be extremely accommodating to appli-

cants of color," consciously "treating them as partners in all processes." Dedication to flexibility ensures that workers and administrators continually strive to uphold the most important tenet of all: to increase a family's level of comfort with an agency in any way possible.

The Homestudy Process

To agencies losing significant numbers of families of color, the homestudy (adoption study) process proves particularly problematic. As one of them admits, "we really don't know what type of homestudy works with minority families." Another adds that, as a result, they tend to get less information from families of color than from white families, meaning that placements are sometimes made with less than optimal amounts of data in hand.

In order to rectify this situation, two pieces of advice were repeatedly given: make the homestudy process an informal one for families of color and emphasize individual rather than group procedures. "You really do need to informalize wherever you can," said one specialist. Others echoed her sentiments, urging conversation, casual interaction in comfortable settings, minimization of paperwork, and, in general, "anything that makes the process more personal." This informalization is essential because "much more than white families, [families of color] resent long, rigorous homestudies." Caseworkers involved must adjust their mindsets accordingly. "They have to get away from investigation and into information sharing."

Along with the measures above, respondents also stressed that individual adoption studies are more effective than group processes when working with minority families. While drawbacks associated with group homestudies are partly logistical (because there are fewer families of color around it can take a long time or be very difficult to get groups together), the more serious charges leveled were that group approaches promote undue competition and intimidate those applicants who may for some reason feel unworthy of consideration in placement decisions.

Not surprisingly, flexibility and clear explanation also play integral parts in culturally sensitive adoption studies. As alluded to earlier, a willingness to meet with families in a variety of places at a variety of times is essential. Workers conducting homestudies have, if necessary, to be able to formulate their information-gathering strategies on a family-by-family basis. When placed in proper context, flexibility should allow an agency "to compromise procedures but not standards." Unfortunately, regulations are making flexibility increasingly difficult in some states. Claims

that adoption study practices are "pretty much dictated by the state" and that "due to legal restrictions, we can't be too flexible in what we do" were not uncommon.

And finally, more than at any other stage in the adoption process, agencies must carefully explain the purposes behind all questioning and interviewing done in relation to the homestudy. Inquiries pertaining to income and credit histories, as well as police checks required by many states, raise particular suspicion, and hence, require special attention and sensitivity. As one director posited, "if the adoption study process is to become more palatable for families of color, fears surrounding these areas must be allayed."

Fees

While largely a private sector phenomenon, adoption fees are nonetheless perceived by respondents as dramatically impacting—primarily negatively—almost all prospective minority adopters. Accordingly, many of those most adept at recruiting and utilizing families of color question the philosophical propriety of assessing such fees. One interviewee worries that adoption fees unfairly distort lines of social responsibility. "Is it a community's responsibility to take care of its young people in need or not?" The answer is obvious, said one specialist: "You simply can't charge for advancing the fundamental well-being of a child." In other words, "adoptions should be provided at public expense."

However, although agreeing in principle, most agencies are forced to differ in practice. "Ideally, all fees should be waived, but we couldn't survive if they were." Given the reality that a majority of this country's private agencies rely, at least in part, on fees to ensure survival, is there anything that can be done to lessen their detrimental effects on minority adopters? Most interviewees think there is. First, and most vitally, agencies need to commit to making fees reasonable for all. While acknowledging that adoption fees are to some degree a necessary evil, many respondents expressed disgust at the levels to which they have currently risen, claiming that certain agencies routinely charge dollar amounts well beyond those required to cover costs or keep their doors open. According to those surveyed, inflated fees wrongly prohibit families from adopting who, for one reason or another, are unable to meet them. As the director of a specializing agency reminds, "An inability to pay is in no way a reflection on one's innate ability to parent."

Secondly, and as mentioned earlier, the problems families of color have with adoption fees are often as much attitudinal as financial. In view of communities' of color

distinct distastes for "purchasing a child," there is tremendous need for dialogue and education with regard to fees and what it is they're used for. Thorough explanations making clear the delineation between "fees for service" and the "buying of human flesh" are a must. As was stated again and again, "[families of color] don't mind paying for social workers' time—i.e., the hours a worker puts in doing a homestudy, time spent in processing an application, and so on" once they fully understand what monies are intended to cover. Honest and open communication between agency and family greatly enhance this understanding. Once lines of communication have been established, many minority families resent being "let off the hook" for fee payment. Several specialized agencies supported this contention, asserting that if understanding is promulgated and *fees are made reasonable* (as is generally the case in specializing agencies), an agency need not, nor should not, differentiate between fees charged to white families and fees charged to families of color. "We used to drastically reduce our fees for minority families, but now we feel it is wrong to do so." A specialist in Black adoption strongly agreed. "If fees have to be charged, there shouldn't be any differentiation. Don't say, 'You poor Blacks *can't* pay, so you don't have to.' "

State Involvement

One state agency administrator interviewed felt strongly that states should be prepared to assume placement costs for minority children. When traditional agencies are forced to either charge fees or depend on inconsistent or fluctuating private dollars, they are unable to eliminate fees as a barrier to same race placement.

This state initiated a specialized adoption program designed specifically to place healthy Black infants under the age of two with Black families. The state's goal was to work with existing private agencies to develop a pool of waiting Black families. Agencies were to receive a fixed amount for each placement through a purchase of service contract. In fact, implementation of the program has proved difficult because private agencies have been unable to commit the necessary human and financial resources needed to establish high-quality minority recruitment and assessment programs.

One means of building on this model would be for states to work with private agencies to provide the necessary start-up costs for effective minority recruitment and retention programs. Continuing support would then be provided via ongoing purchase of service agreements for placements made.

Summary

Lack of specificity in the advice and practices presented in this section is far from accidental. As revealed by specializing and traditional agencies alike, single or "packageable" models guaranteeing increased fruits from same race labors simply don't exist. While certain general approaches appear to work better than others, there are no easily reproducible strategies for ensuring that effective utilizations of adopters of color become realities. To a large extent, successes enjoyed in quests for same race families remain closely tied to the abilities, efforts, and, most importantly, *dedication levels* of individual workers and agencies involved.

Conclusion

Compilations, comparisons, and insights presented in this paper underscore the breadth and complexity of issues and concerns surrounding minority adoption. American adoption agencies' policies toward and handling of minority adoption are extremely diverse and widely-varying.

Nevertheless, consensus emerged from the interviews and the data on several important points. There is clearly agreement that certain organizational and institutional barriers systematically impede efforts to adopt by families of color. If we are committed to same race placement as the placement of first choice, then these barriers must be addressed both in the adoption community and in the larger public policy arena.

We also have models that effectively demonstrate the kinds of techniques that are effective in eliminating these barriers. Minority families *can* be found for minority children, but only if we are willing to examine our assumptions, policies and practices, and make the necessary changes.

NACAC and the Transracial Adoption Debate

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) has been involved in the debate over transracial adoption for many years. It was at our third annual conference in 1972 that the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) introduced a resolution opposing transracial adoptions.

Subsequently, NACAC addressed this difficult issue through a series of policy statements. In 1981 the board took the position that "placement of children with a family of like ethnic background is desirable because such families are likely to provide the children with skills and strengths that counter the ill effects of racism." However, "the special needs of minority children who are of mixed ethnic background, school age, sibling groups or who have handicapping conditions should be considered in order to prevent unnecessary delays in placement. NACAC supports inclusion of multiethnic adoption as an option for children." Thus, while supporting same race placements, the position acknowledged that some children may need to be placed transracially rather than continue to wait in foster care. It was also assumed that families adopting transracially would need access to a wide range of support mechanisms.

In 1988 NACAC invited Sydney Duncan, founder of Homes for Black Children of Detroit, to address the annual conference. In her speech entitled "Healing Old Wounds" she both posed the problem and offered suggestions. She stated, in part:

> The past sixteen years of struggle about the rightness of transracial adoptions resulted in some positive service gains for Black children, at the same time it has also caused considerable pain and anguish, for all of us within the adoption community . . . For those of us who are Black, the pain has been fear of losing control of our own destiny through loss of our own children. For those of you who are white and have adopted transracially, the pain has been denial of your right to parent a child that you have accepted into your family and call your own.
>
> How do we help each other? For those of you who are white and whose children carry our color and the warmth of the sun in their genes, I believe we as Black people can be of help to your children. Especially those children who carry emotional scars of the difficulty of their early lives for whom the difficulty begins to re-emerge when they reach the turbulent adolescent years.
>
> I believe we can be of help, as you seek to give your children of color answers about their heritage. And answers about the craziness of our world in relation to color. And as you seek to give them answers to the questions for which every adopted child seeks an answer.
>
> For those of you who are white I ask help and moral support as we Black

people seek to mobilize the mainstream of Black families, that unknown majority within our community that I believe has the capacity to respond to the vast numbers of Black children who are entering the system.

At the same conference, the NACAC board of directors expanded on its 1981 position and offered ten positive steps that federal, state, and local officials should take to fully utilize family resources in minority communities through aggressive and culturally sensitive recruitment and retention programs. In addition, NACAC as an organization committed direct resources to the development, growth, and empowerment of minority adoptive parent groups.

In recent years, evidence has pointed to the fact that many healthy minority infants have been placed with white families, while same race families wait or have limited access to the system that serves their children. The NACAC Board of Directors passed a resolution in August of 1990 in response to this practice:

> Recognizing that fees charged prospective adoptive families present barriers to the most culturally appropriate placement for children in need of adoption, NACAC advocates that all child-placing agencies have as a goal working to develop alternative funding sources to cover all costs related to adoption services by working with both private and public sectors.

In September of 1990 a group of administrators of state adoption programs reviewed NACAC's position on fees and endorsed the following position:

> The state adoption specialists support implementation of state-led programs to encourage placement of all children with foster and adoptive families of the same race.

NACAC's current federal grant, "A Parent-Coordinated Minority Family Recruitment Project" allowed us to undertake this current survey of public and private adoption agencies around the country. In the grant application, NACAC promised to highlight agency practices that encourage single parent, lower to middle-income families, non-professional families, and families with children to adopt. We also agreed to identify procedures or policies that cause potential minority families to "drop out" of the adoption process. The information from interviews done in conjunction with the "Barriers to Same race Placement" research do, in fact, point the way to timely and appropriate same race placements.

In the future, NACAC will continue to work in as many ways as possible to attain the overall mission of our organization:

> Every child has the right to a permanent family. The Council advocates the right of every child to a permanent, continuous, nurturing, and culturally sensitive family, and presses for the legal adoptive placement of any child denied that right.

The North American Council on Adoptable Children

WHO WE ARE:

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) is a nonprofit, broadly-based coalition of volunteer adoptive parent support and citizen advocacy groups, caring individuals, and agencies committed to meeting the needs of waiting children in the United States and Canada.

OUR ACTIVITIES:

- a quarterly newsletter called *Adoptalk*, devoted to current issues in adoption, foster care, parenting, and child advocacy
- the largest national conference on adoption issues, uniting the concerns and resources of over 1000 experienced adoptive parents, child welfare professionals, and advocates annually
- adoptive parent group development and assistance to a network of over 500 local organizations throughout the United States and Canada working to provide public awareness of adoption issues, family support programs, administrative monitoring, and recruitment of prospective parents
- adoptive family recruitment initiatives generally and in targeted communities
- public education, special events, and Adoption Awareness Month across the United States and Canada
- post-legal adoption service models, including a peer-counseling curriculum
- research and publications on current critical issues in special needs adoption
- strong, consistent, directed advocacy on behalf of children and families, including federal testimony on parental leave, medically fragile infants, post-legal adoption service needs, subsidy, and recruitment of minority parents for waiting minority children

OUR AGENDA:

We believe the goal of permanence for all children is realistic, cost-effective, and clearly in their best interest. Collectively, as concerned citizens, parents, decision makers, and advocates, our impact and ability to effect change for vulnerable children is dramatic. Together we can make a difference.

TO JOIN WITH US:

NACAC is a membership organization that needs your support. Individual and parent group memberships are $25 annually. Organizational membership is $100. Additional contributions are also welcome and needed. For further information on benefits of membership or to join with us on behalf of special needs children, contact NACAC, 1821 University Avenue, Suite N498, St. Paul, Minnesota 55104; 612-644-3036.